ASIFA EAST • The International Animated Film Society

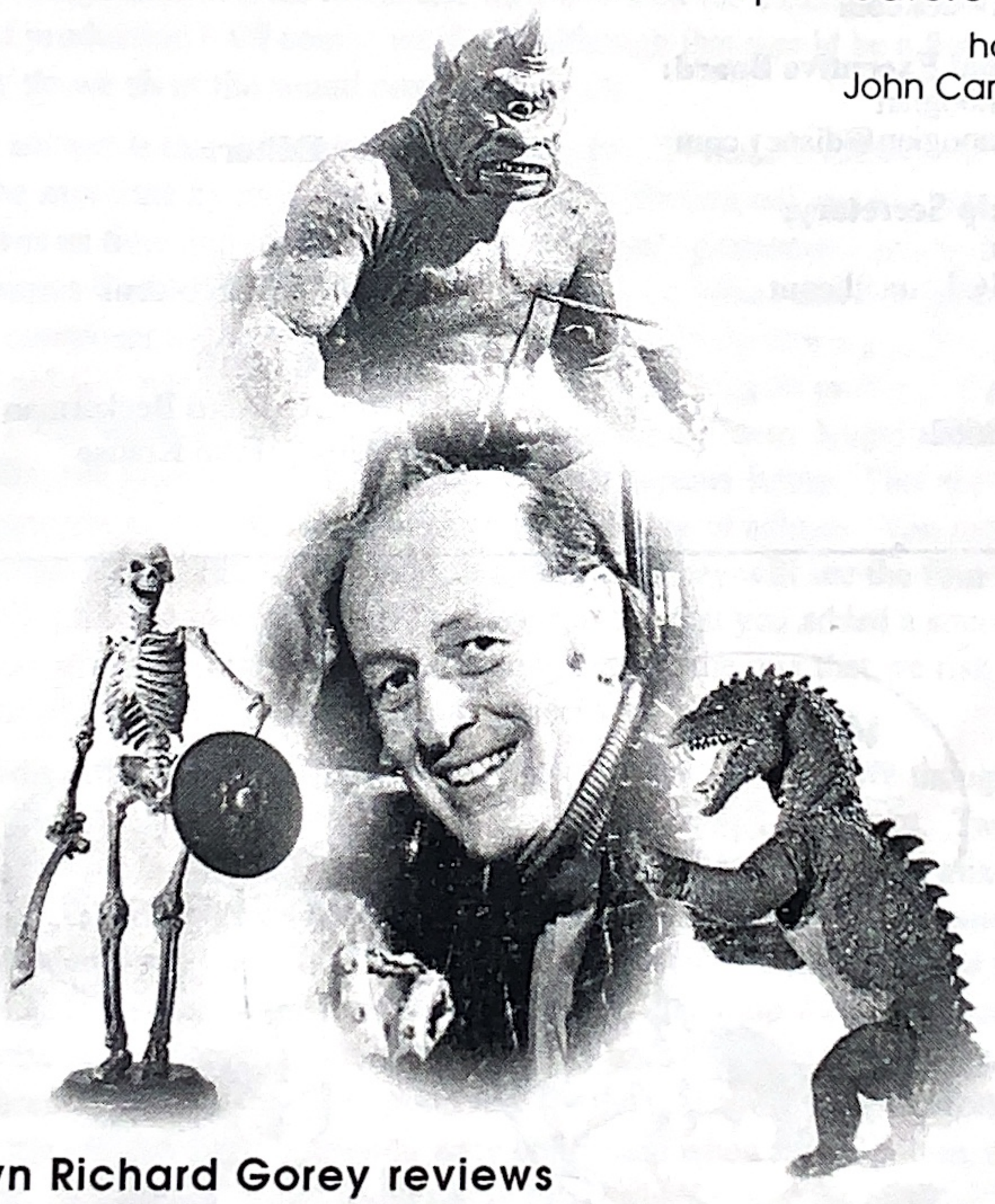
aNYmator

May 2004

Ray Harryhausen Comes To New York

May 10 2004, 7:30 P.M. • School of Visual Arts
209 East 23rd Street • 3rd Floor Ampetheatere

hosted by
John Canemaker



Our own Richard Gorey reviews
"Ray Harryhausen: An animated life."

Also Inside

- David Levy on sound
- Gender studies with Linda Beck
- Howard Beckerman Comics Return
- And Much, Much More!!

ASIFA East

The International Animated Film Society Northeast /New York Chapter

A Program of the New York Foundation For The Arts

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"Mix This" or "Sounds Deceiving"

When we will learn? Why do so many of us leave a sound mix delighted, only to become unhappy with it the next day? If you blame the mix house or their engineer, you're probably barking up the wrong tree (or woofing up the wrong tweeter). Most of us would agree that sound can easily make up half of the experience of viewing a film. If this is so, why do we try to squeeze such a vital step as the sound mix into such a short period of time? Do we speed through other stages of our film in this way? Do we knock out a storyboard in three hours and then live with the consequences during the next year of production? Of course we don't (although that would be a fun exercise, huh?) Why do we short the sound process so much?

The short answer is that the meter is running, baby. To make it affordable, we try to cut down the mix time by preparing cue sheets and labeling our sound elements carefully. This saves us time and money. However, this won't guarantee a satisfying sound mix. In Shamus Culhane's "From Script To Screen", he writes that one should never invite their composer to the mix session. He warns that they will try to feature the music too loudly. I would go one further to say that our biggest problem at the mix is ourselves. I was speaking about this problem recently to Candy Kugel and she said that when you first see your film with sound everything appears funny. This applies even to the most mundane sound effects cut to the most ordinary of actions. You may be laughing, but this has no ultimate value for your audience. They will see the film for the first time and will not burst into laughs and applause to see that you added a sound effect for the closet door closing. I think that we get so excited at the mix that we risk losing what we have already in very short supply: objectivity.

Dale Clowdis and I mixed our film, Scout Says, in one long day. We thought we had taken care of everything and walked out of the session feeling confident. Two days later, removed from the superior sound system of the mixing facility, the mix sounded flawed to me. As an exercise I jotted down all the issues I had. I was astonished to find seventeen problem spots. I called Dale with my concerns. He had the good advice of waiting a bit and living with the mix for a while. We ended up waiting almost a month before we were ready to remix. During that time I had been able to view the film on enough different TV set-ups to get a good feel for the real audio trouble spots. My suspicions that the mix could be improved were confirmed when Jack Spillum, on a visit to Cartoon Pizza, asked me, "You'll be remixing this, right?"

I decided to channel all this into a positive experience for my Career Strategy class. Our composer on Scout Says, Chris Jones, joined me in front of the class as we obsessed over each sound and music cue in the film. Painstakingly, we compiled a list of nearly fifty things to change in the mix. I could tell some of the students were tuning out at the monotony of the exercise. I thought there was a lesson in that too. It's not all fun and games, folks! Filmmaking is a slow and often tedious labor. The ironic thing is

that to have a successful film, none of that effort can show on the screen. In that sense, the best filmmakers are truly magicians. "Hey, Rocky! Watch me pull a rabbit out of that hat!"

ASFA-East News!

I'm pleased to announce our new Membership Sec, Linda Beck. After over two years of faithful service, ila Abramson is passing the torch to Linda as of this month. ila has been busy running her own successful animation recruitment bizz. If you haven't registered with ila, shame on you! Linda Beck has been a great asset to the board in the past year. She's got experience on both the business and art side of animation. She's detail oriented, has great energy and ideas, and is one helluvah schmooza! Plus, she can tell the Krause brothers apart. In short, the perfect new Membership Sec for ASIFA-East. Please contact Linda Beck at for all your membership needs.

And now a few words from our new Secretary:

Hi there. My first secretarial task, as delegated to me by our president, is to explain proper usage and care of an exciting new ASIFA East feature: your official ASIFA East membership card featuring the smashing design of Fran Krause! Your address label includes the last date you paid your dues, which acts as a reminder as to when to renew. Although ASIFA East uses only the finest quality of standard cheap office paper, it is still rather flimsy, so you may want to laminate it with clear packaging tape so that it doesn't get beat up in your wallets. Having a portable membership card will make it easier for you to get your pass discount at Ottawa as well as entrance into the occasional ASIFA event that requires proof of membership.

Further uses possible in the future as well. Membership cards will be printed twice a year in the newsletter to accommodate new members.

I'm happy to field any questions or comments.
Please feel free to contact me. email me at *lindaleena8@hotmail.com*
or call me at *718.533.7006*.

-Linda Beck

Bill Plympton on the Sundance Channel in May

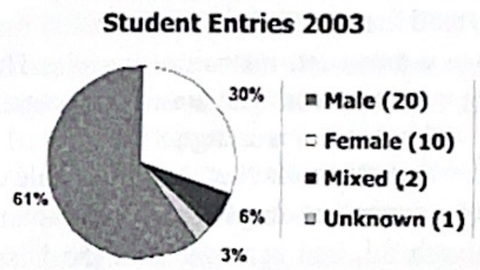
Sundance Channel dives into the weird and wonderful world of maverick animator Bill Plympton with the May film series "Get to Know: Bill Plympton." Spanning the years 1987 to 2003, "Get to Know: Bill Plympton" presents the animated features The Tune and Mutant Aliens, as well as a range of new and vintage shorts. The shorts program , "Mondo Plympton" includes Plympton's most recent shorts Eat and Parking, along with Your Face, One of Those Days, How to Kiss, 25 Ways to Quit Smoking, Plymptoons, Draw, and Nosehair. "Get to Know: Bill Plympton" will air as a triple feature, premiering on Sunday, May 2nd at 8:00pm.

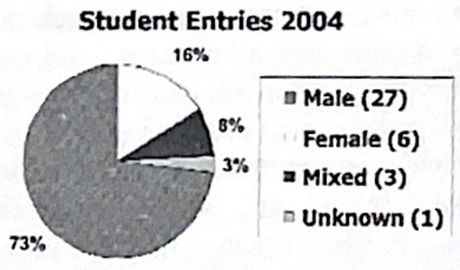
The series' individual components - The Tune, Mutant Aliens and "Mondo Plympton" will also air on an individual basis during the month, check your local listings.

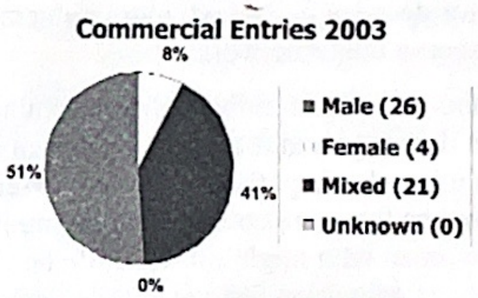
Male And Female ASIFA Festival Entry Ratios And What You Had To Say About The Industry

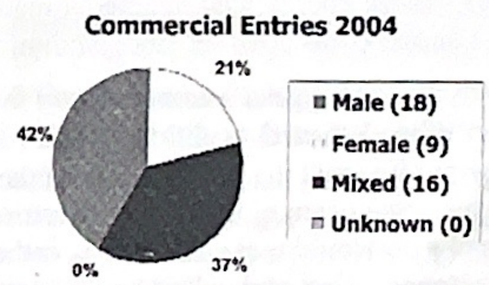
By Linda Beck

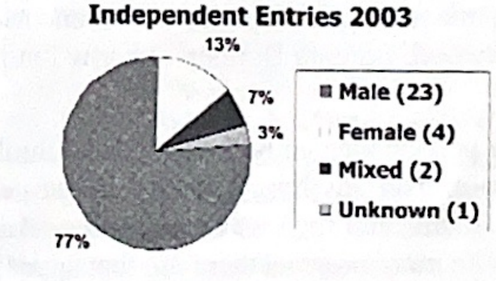
While I've never noticed any sort of imbalance in the attendance ratios of men and women at any ASIFA event, out of sheer curiosity, I took a moment to look into the male female demographics of the Festival Entries for the past two years. Obviously, the ASIFA festival is no microcosm of the animation industry as a whole, but as anyone regardless of gender, etc. can enter a film to be judged, I found the vastly uneven proportions interesting. I asked around for thoughts of the working animation world and impressions of the male to female ratios therein.

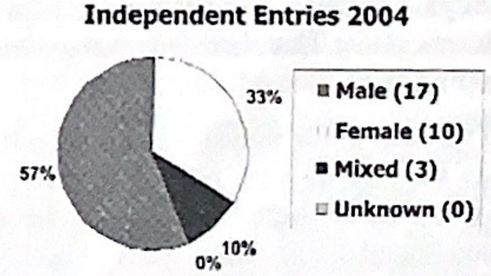












A general trend among the responses I rounded up has to do with stereotypical male/female qualities and preferences. Self-employed animator, Mike Overbeck believes that animation is a very "reclusive practice." "Men seem more prone to be introverted non-social creatures. Animation producers, however, who play a much more communicative role in the industry often tend to be women." Jim Mortensen, a student at School of Visual Arts, believes that "there are a good number of women in animation, just not necessarily in the production roles. Traditionally in our society, women have drifted or have been pushed to the human resources roles, the managing roles, roles where people dealings comprise most of the day. Both seem to be saying that women are better "peo-

ple-people" and therefore are more prominent in roles that benefit from these skills. Independent Animator Signe Baumane points out other coveted female qualities and offers an interesting contrast to this. "Very soon I foresee the whole industry to be overtaken by women. In Latvia where I am from, from early on in the 2 D animation, there always has been 90 % women. It was explained that women are more patient, organized, and details oriented. Animation was considered there as some kind of applied art, like knitting. In the big studios in Moscow and Kiev, the producers and directors were men like most of the animators, but the rendering artists were mostly women."

Another idea that came up in my investigation was the idea that perhaps women are more prominent in independent work than in high-profile studio positions. Independent animator Fran Krause asked an associate at Cartoon Network if she saw many pitches from female animators, "She said 'hardly any.' Don't know where all the animator girls are at." Rich Gorey recounted a conversation on the subject, "Linda Simensky and I had a chat about this disproportion a few weeks ago, and she said that she felt animation is- to many men- a trade, instead of an art, and that women see it as an art, instead of a trade. There ARE many women animators, but they are making very personal, private films independently, and the men are getting jobs in the studios, where there is a higher profile. Many women are more in touch with the side of creativity that demands they be vulnerable and "naked" in their art. These days, more and more women are inspired by the Japanese Miyazaki films because they are more gentle, thoughtful, and cerebral than the Disney epics, whose energy has attracted a male energy for decades." Naked, more vulnerable art, I suppose has a harder time landing a time slot on a major network.

Candy Kugel suggests another reason for the number of women in independent filmmaking, "When I started, traditionally the men did the drawings and the women were in ink & paint. It wasn't the heavy lifting of the reams of paper that kept the men the "draw-ers", but the years of training-- apprenticeships-- that studios felt more comfortable giving it to a man who would make it a career, rather than a woman who might not dedicate her life to cartoons. That said, when I went to the first Ottawa animation festival, all the interesting independent work was being done by women: Caroline Leaf, Kathy Rose, Susan Pitt, Sally Cruikshank, Janet Perlman. And the New York group of independent women: Mary Beams, Anita Thatcher, Jane Aaron, Maureen Selwood, Barbara Bottner-- I know I'm forgetting some."

"I've been in the industry long enough to see the percentages go both ways and I think it has more to do with economic factors and fashion than anything else. Over the years we've noticed there have been waves of female interns and then waves of males. And I have found quality employees of both genders. The more projects there are that appeal to girls, the more women will be attracted into the business."

Animator Debra Solomon has recently looked into that very idea: "In the research stage of the pre-school pilot I am working on for Disney playhouse, I read several books by Vivian Gussin Paley. These books are all about kids and how they play, and the sex differentiation of boys and girls. What they all boiled down to was girls will watch boys shows but boys will not watch girls shows, unless there is no other boy around. So, the networks want boys shows that both sexes will watch...girls get lost is the message…"

Thanks to all who contributed in providing me with such a variety of answers. I look forward to seeing what the future of our art form holds!

Ray Harryhausen: An animated life.

A review by Richard Gorey

Being Ray Harryhausen must be a blessing and a curse. A blessing because his films have influenced thousands (maybe millions) of people all over the world, with their grand visions of myths and monsters, brought to life by Harryhausen's unique artistry.

A curse because those same people have made it their life's work to endlessly scrutinize and analyze these films- in exhaustive and excruciating detail, putting the master effects technician's work under the remorseless eye of a microscope as they try to discover just exactly how he rendered this split screen, or where the matte line is in this dinosaur fight, or whether this shot is a blue screen or a sodium backing.

Harryhausen's body of work has been endlessly discussed and studied. His films have become famous, and revered, specifically for his presence in their creation, and it could be argued that he is the only effects technician in history who has such a following. Certainly his movies have been the guiding force in the lives of two generations of special effects artists, who cite Harryhausen's Sinbad and Jason films as their inspiration.

Twenty-five years ago, writer Jeff Rovin did an exhaustive (and sometimes exhausting) retrospective of Harryhausen's films, called From the Land Beyond Beyond. It was a thorough, fascinating, but unfortunately not very objective look at the work of this master craftsman, and Tony Dalton's new volume, Ray Harryhausen, an Animated Life, could be considered the ultimate fulfillment of what Rovin envisioned, but couldn't quite pull off.

Harryhausen has always been cooperative with fans and historians: he has made himself wonderfully accessible to writers and critics and even some major directors, who have used him as a character actor in their films. He has even written a series of books himself, called the Film Fantasy Scrapbook, in which he discussed his work. Nearly a decade ago, the magazine Cinefantastique did an extensive, three-part series on the animator's films, but Harryhausen was reportedly unhappy with the cynical tone- and the tendency in the piece to quote from largely negative reviews. He wrote a response, polite but firm, acknowledging that the piece itself was a tribute to the power of the movies, but expressing disappointment that there had been an effort to judge the films by more contemporary standards. The incident with Cinefantastique is symptomatic of the obsessive nature of Harryhausen's followers: their expectations of their hero – and their experiences with his films, sometimes border on the unrealistic. Few people who write about the animator's work have not seen his movies hundreds of times, myself included. Harryhausen has stated, in the new book, that the average effects budget for a film like 1969's Valley of Gwangi was in the $35,000 to $40,000 range. It's perhaps unfair to expect the same things from such a film as one would, for instance, of Jurassic Park- a movie I found technically exhilarating, but somehow emotionally cold.

By now, of course, many fans are familiar with the often-repeated stories: of how Harryhausen was only able to record thirteen frames a day for the fabled Jason skeleton sword fight, of how the octopus in It Came From beneath The Sea only had six tentacles, instead of eight, of how Kerwin Matthews had to endure the indignity of sewage sprayed on him from the canal in Spain for the storm sequence from Sinbad.

I wondered, after all that had been written about Harryhausen's work, how someone might

bring something new to this subject, especially when the format (Harryhausen talks about the technique behind his films and animation process) is not new. The appeal of the new book is not that it has never been done before, but that it has never been done better, and with more elegance and polish. Ray Harryhausen, an Animated Life is a glorious, glossy, thorough examination of not only the specific process that brought these fantasy creatures to life, but of the process by which such films are conceived and created. The historical details of Harryhausen's life may already be familiar to those who have studied his work: how he saw King Kong at age thirteen, how he met and worked with his idol, the genius Willis O'Brien, and how he eventually went out on his own, and hooked up with producer Charles Schneer to create what have become fantasy and science fiction classics.

This is set against hundreds of color and black and white photos- many, thankfully, new, and not seen in other articles and books. I was delighted to see behind the scenes photographs of the setups for some "Dynamation" scenes which made it clear just exactly how this clever and effective technique worked, and was managed. In the past, before the revolution in effects that somehow demystified the business, Harryhausen was reluctant to give specifics regarding how such illusions were managed.

"A magician never reveals all of his secrets," he has often said in the past. But today, audiences and readers, are more savvy- and more interested in how these films were made. Sadly, the simplistic (by today's standards) methods Harryhausen pioneered have been superceded by more complex (and, oddly, less involving and charismatic) procedures. This new, computer driven era seems to be the appropriate time for Harryhausen to lift the veil and discuss with unprecedented frankness his techniques, tricks of the trade, and inspirations.

The book is really a career-focused autobiography, with detailed chapters on each film, and photographs which illustrate nearly every facet of the "Dynamation" process. It was fascinating to explore this wonderful book, and to see just how some of the moments I cherished from my youth were created and executed. Harryhausen, as well as being a phenomenal special effects wizard, was also quite skilled as an editor, writer, and photographer. His musings on the psychological use of color, the impact of clever editing, and the dramatic import of lighting to create a mood in audiences are added bonuses. He also discusses the contribution of music to his films. This has, over the years, been one of the components that have made these works stand far above their contemporaries, and enter into the realm of true classics. Miklos Rosza, Jerome Moross, David Buttolph, Ennio Morricone, and of course, the great Bernard Herrmann all contributed powerful scores to the Harryhausen/Schneer productions: some of these have become cult items in their own right, and have sold well on CD and record albums.

The best of the Harryhausen/Schneer films shine not just because the effects are superlative (even by today's standards) but because within them, all the elements come together; music, effects, direction, performances, and story, to create a satisfying whole. When Harryhausen was at the top of his game, the films were sublime: The 7th Voyage of Sinbad, Jason and the Argonauts, Twenty Million Miles to Earth, and The Valley of Gwangi are all remarkable works, whose rediscovery on DVD and video is a tribute to their staying power. Other films were not as well thought of, but even the less-revered projects have much to recommend them.

It was said Harryhausen was wounded by the cold reception afforded his final film, Clash of the Titans, but it's interesting to see how it has become THE film for the generation who saw it in theaters as children. I've spoken to several younger people who cite Titans as the reason they went into animation- and you can't ask for a better tribute than that.

What I found ingratiating about this book (and all Harryhausen's writing) is his objectivity: he'll tell you he cringes every time he sees that latex model of Gwangi stumble through the entrance to the Forbidden Valley (God bless ya, Ray; so do we). He'll speak candidly about his disappointment with the destruction in Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers. (He had to animate, frame by frame, the destruction of the Supreme Court building and the Capital, due to the budget constraints.) He'll admit that a handsome film like Mysterious Island somehow didn't come together for him, and tells his readers what his wishes were for it.

But the author has nothing to apologize for. There are moments he's delivered that will surely live forever, many of them in his personal favorite film, Jason and the Argonauts. Who will forget that nightmarish shot of the bronze giant, Talos, turning to look at Nigel Green? It's an image Jeff Rovin rightly calls, "One of the most chilling moments in film". And what about the unforgettable skeleton sword fight which climaxes that movie? Writer Danny Peary thinks it's "the best special effects sequence in the history of the movies." Many people agree. The list of great Harryhausen scenes goes on and on: the roping of Gwangi, the Cyclops in Sinbad roasting Haroufa on a spit, a flying saucer cutting the Washington Monument in half, Medusa stalking Perseus, and of course, the Beast from 20,000 fathoms eating that poor, dumb policeman like a cocktail weenie. We all have those memories: some of us were inspired to pursue similar careers because of them.

It's terrific that Harryhausen agreed to share his secrets with the public, at long last. Though of course the films will be his greatest legacy, this book is an invaluable addition for anyone who cherishes the movies themselves, or for anyone who has ever had an interest in stop-motion photography- a storytelling technique that is sadly vanishing, as the computer age matures and expands.

This is sad to someone like me. I think I'll miss the tactile sensation of actually touching the puppets and moving them about on tabletop sets. Computers render things with great skill and fidelity (omitting the strobe that characterizes even the best of Harryhausen's work) but for every "gimme" there's a "gotcha", and the modern animated films lack the charm, appeal, and heart that Harryhausen's have. His creatures have personality: they give performances- through his artistry. Those who aspire to a career as modern computer animators would benefit from a closer study of these seminal classics. Check out how the Cyclops licks his chops as he roasts one of Sinbad's men. Look at the subtlety of acting and the fear in the Homunculus, as he comes to life on Koura's marble slab. The way Gwangi's lip curls when he snarls at that worrisome dwarf who loosens the locks on his cage. The compelling, even sensual delicacy in Kali's dance down the temple steps, lit by torches. These are works of animation art that will entertain and thrill people for years to come.

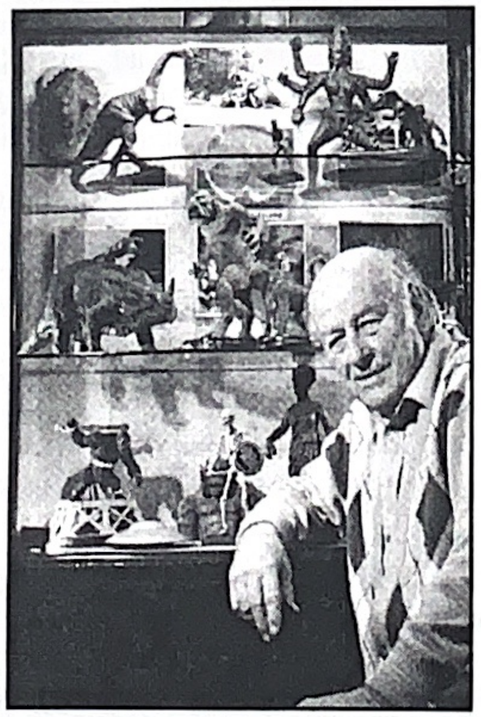
If anything, purists will perhaps even want more from the book. Personally, I was charmed in the past by the reminiscences of actors like Kerwin Matthews and Gary Merrill, who spoke candidly of their delight at seeing the final products in theaters, after months of acting against poles with eyes, and blue screens instead of monsters. I'd like to have seen a little more of this kind of thing. And I'm sure there are some fans who'll cry "foul" when they don't find that stunning publicity portrait of curvy Caroline Munro, from Golden Voyage included. You know the one; sure ya do.

But these are minor carps: the book is a treasure trove for anyone who has been inspired and entertained by these unique and influential fantasy masterpieces. What's most surprising, perhaps, is that no one has yet come along to replace Harryhausen. If anything, it's directors like Joe Dante, John Landis, and of course Speilberg who have assumed the

responsibility for delivering similar such films, not the technical wizards who work for these modern masters. Harryhausen created spectacular illusions by himself, in small rented studios. Today such scenes are produced by teams of hundreds of anonymous craftsmen and women- most of whom will claim Sinbad and Jason as the guiding forces in their careers. I'm glad Harryhausen gave us this record of his thoughts and memories, and I'm pleased someone like Tony Dalton was able to arrange the plethora of information into something cogent and visually appealing. In its way, the book is a study guide and a companion piece to the films themselves. The author's speaking style is well suited to the material at hand, and the technical explanations, while quite dense, are not so esoteric as to be over the heads of most readers.

Also featured (and appreciated) are the dozens of sketches and illustrations rendered by Harryhausen for the pre-production phases of the films. In these, we get to see initial designs for the Ymir, from Twenty Million Miles to Earth, his original concept for the Cyclops (scary) and his designs and storyboards for the roping of Gwangi. Harryhausen's illustrative style ranges from the elegant to the simplistic: his animals are always more interesting than his humans in these sketches- it's as if he knows it's his fantasy creatures that draw audiences to these worlds. And while Harryhausen himself may not have been primarily concerned with the more character-driven aspects of his films, he was lucky enough to have screenwriters and actors who usually managed to bring the level of these stories up to the expertise of the effects. Laurence Naismith, for instance, in Jason: James Franciscus in Gwangi, (my personal favorite Harryhausen film character) John Philip Law, in Sinbad, and Maggie Smith in Clash of the Titans. Harryhausen was lucky in his career to have had his contribution supported by these and other talented performers. It would have been the icing on the cake had the book featured reminiscences and interviews with such people.

Still, those purchasing the book (at fifty dollars) have not come for lessons on acting against monsters, they're here for the monsters themselves, and Dalton's retrospective manages the feat of covering a topic that has been visited many times before in a way that makes the asking price well worth it. Ray Harryhausen, an Animated Life, is the best examination yet of one of the true geniuses of modern filmmaking.



An Evening of Betty Boop Shorts

She's best known for Boop-Oop-a-Doop and Snow-White, which we're showing, along with the first short the Fleishers made in color, Poor Cinderella, in which the prince's teeth are blue. Let Me Call You Sweetheart, Any Rags, Is My Palm Read?, and Grampy's Indoor Outing round out the evening.

Unrated, but not suitable for many children. Running time: approx. 70 min.

Wed. May 12 at 5:15 and 7:15

Jacob Burns Film Center
364 Manville Road, Pleasantville, NY 10570
Box Office: *914-747-5555 • www.burnsfilmcenter.org*

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Call for Used Animation Equipment

High School of Art and Design, home of Ralph Bakshi, Howard Beckerman, and Art Spiegelman, is seeking used animation equipment for its growing and very popular animation/cartooning department.

Our cinema studies department is also seeking a used 16mm projector.

All donations will receive a prompt acknowlegement for tax purposes.

Contact: David Mulkins - *212-460-9887 • mulbd@yahoo.com*
John Filardi - *jafbh@yahoo.com*

Call for Animatiors

Independent documentary currently in pre-production is looking for an animator or animators to collaborate with on animated segments for film.

Catalyst Films is producing a documentary film on **Toots Shor, legendary New York restauranteur/saloonkeeper of the 1940's - 1960's.**

We are looking for a unique way to animate this oral history and bring Toots to life as a character while integrating it with the rest of the film. We are open to ideas and are willing to explore different techniques that might be fitting for the material, from cel-based to computer animation.

Animators (cel, computer, After Effects, etc.) with reels/examples of work are encouraged to apply. Please send cover letter and reel (VHS or DVD) to:

Bigger Than Life ANIMATION
428 Broome St, Basement Office
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New York, NY 10013

Email: *postmaster@catalyst-films.com*

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GREETINGS
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